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## ABSTRACT

Research indicates that the family roles of men are slowly changing, with a small minority of those sampled having primary childcare/household duties. To examine the background, life satisfaction, motives, and personality traits of such men, 16 married, male adults, whose wives were employed outside the home, and who had over 50% of the responsibility for childcare and household tasks, were interviewed. Subjects also completed the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) and the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). An analysis of the responses showed that the most frequent reasons for their current lifestyle were the changed economy, a return to school, or wives starting work. Most, but not all, wives had positive reactions to the role change. Being with the children and influencing their development was the most frequently cited positive aspect of the nontraditional role, with housework the most frequently cited "worst" aspect. Thirty-six percent of these men were categorized as androgynous on the BSRI. They scored significantly higher than the CPI norm on the dominance, social presence, self-acceptance, and flexibility scales, and significantly lower on the sense of well being, responsibility, socialization, self-control, and good impression scales. The findings indicate these men were happy in their role choice and would recommend it to others. (MCF)

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Life Satisfaction, and Personality Characteristics  
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The work and household roles of adult men and women are changing. The traditional structure of the family with the husband/father as provider and the wife/mother as housewife, which lasted from the 1830's to 1980, is ending (Bernard, 1981). From 1940 to 1980 the percentage of mothers with children under 18 who were employed rose from 8.6% to 56.6% (Hoffman, 1983).

As women enter the work force, husbands of these women are beginning to help with more of the childcare and household duties at home. A number of investigators (Beckett and Smith, 1981; Beckman and Houser, 1979; Gold & Andres, 1980; Hoffman, 1963; Pleck, 1979) have found that husbands of working wives help more at home than husbands with unemployed wives. However, usually the increase in helping is somewhat marginal (Hoffman, 1983), and women still carry the major burden of childcare/household responsibilities.

Lein (1979), based on interviews with 25 Boston-area families, found that men had different social networks than women resulting in their receiving little support for their helping with household tasks. In fact some males were ribbed for helping by their male peers. In addition, men in this study perceived their primary contribution to the family in terms of their job and therefore were hesitant to acknowledge that they needed help in this area and hence should be responsible for helping more with housework. More support for this explanation of men's reluctance to do housework comes from a sample of 650 women in the Detroit metropolitan area (Model, 1981). The greater the comparative gap in the wages of the husband versus the wife, the less he was likely to contribute in housework. Others (Beckman and Houser, 1979; Perruci, Potter, and Rhoads, 1978; Russell, 1982) have found that the sex role ideology of men was a determinant of husbands' household/child-care activities also.

Although some men may be helping more around the house when their wives are employed, men who are willing to assume the role of "househusband," to take the primary responsibility for childcare and household duties, are very rare indeed. Very few studies have been published that included these men in the sample. Lamb and his colleagues have published several articles, chronologizing a study of 51 nontraditional and traditional families in Sweden that included 17 fathers who were primary caretakers of infants for at least one month (Lamb, Frodi, Frodi, and Hwang, 1982; Lamb, Frodi, Hwang, and Frodi, 1982; Lamb, Frodi, Hwang, Frodi, and Steinberg, 1982). Russell (1982) has studied 50 shared-caregiving families in Australia, with fathers having sole responsibility for the children at least 15 hours per week. In a study of paternal involvement in Israel, Sagi (1982) included 15 families in which the father was more involved in childcare than the mother.

One of the few studies of "househusbands" in the United States was performed by Beer (1983); however, in this investigation 38 of the 56 househusbands did less than half of the housework. Field (1978) included 12 primary caretaker fathers in her sample, and Radin (1982), in a study of fathers and preschoolers, included a group of 20 primary caretaker fathers who were responsible for their children approximately 58% of the time. Pruett (1983) also has studied 17 infants of primary caretaker fathers, and Levine (1976) and Holcomb (1982) have published interviews with men who had major household/childcare responsibilities.

These studies do indicate that the roles of men may be starting to slowly change. Though in most of these samples men with the primary childcare/household duties were in a minority, the fact that there were any men assuming this nontraditional role is indicative of change. Because male as well as female sex roles in the United States may be slowly expanding and because in the future more males may occupy the role of househusband, current investigations of men who may

be at the forefront of a social revolution in males' roles are important. The focus of this study was solely on such men, men who were married with primary household responsibilities, to examine their motives, their hardships as well as their joys, the reactions of others to their nontraditional role, personality characteristics that might differentiate them from more traditional men, and their overall satisfaction with their life and role.

#### Method

##### Subjects

Sixteen male subjects were recruited through newspaper advertisements, letters to pediatricians, letters to dentists, letters to nursery schools, notices in a women's center newsletter, and by word of mouth. The men included in the study met the following criteria: a) they were married, b) their wives were employed outside the home, and 3) they had over 50% of the responsibility for childrearing and household tasks.

The majority of the men were white and were from a middle class background. Eighty per cent of the men reported having had at least two years of college. Ages of the men ranged from 21 to 46 with a mean of 31.5 years. The men had an average of 1.75 children with one man having 5 children and two men having none.

##### Materials and procedure

The men were interviewed individually by the male coauthor, and their responses were tape recorded. Interviews covered background variables that might have influenced the assumption of their current nontraditional role, reaction of their wives, male peers, parents, and in-laws to their nontraditional role, what effects they thought their role would have on their children, and their satisfaction with their current lifestyle.

In addition men completed forms estimating the hours per week they worked, the hours per week their wives worked, the importance of work in their lives and

in their wives' lives, and performance by themselves and their wives of household and childcare tasks. Regarding the latter, men gave percentages of total household tasks and of total childcare tasks they performed, their wives performed, or others such as maids or babysitters, performed. In addition 26 specific household/childcare tasks were listed, 14 feminine tasks such as cooking meals and dusting the house, 6 masculine tasks such as car maintenance and mowing the grass, and 6 neutral tasks such as paying bills and serving refreshments for guests. The men were asked to estimate percentages of time they, versus their spouses or others, did each of these tasks.

The men were also asked to take the California Psychological Inventory (Gough, 1975) and the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974; 1977). Fourteen of the men returned these completed test forms.

### Results

#### Division of Work and Household Duties

The men worked an average of 36.1 hours outside the home, with their wives working a mean of 41.8 hours. When asked to rate the importance of work in their lives on a one (not at all important) to ten (very important) scale, the average rating was 7.19. The comparable rating for their wives was 7.44.

On the average 58.9% of the total childcare tasks were completed by the men and 41.1% by their spouses. The men also reported doing a larger percentage of household tasks, 59.4% compared to the 35.3% done by the spouse. The latter percentages were significantly different at the .01 level. Also, because some household chores were performed by other outside help, these percentages do not add to 100%. The average percentage of feminine tasks done by the men, the average percentage of feminine tasks done by the wives, the average percentage of masculine tasks done by the men, and the average percentage of masculine tasks done by the wives were computed. Men reported doing an average of 53.7% of the

feminine tasks (45.1% for wives) and 80.9% of the masculine tasks (15.1% for wives). For the masculine tasks, this difference was significant at the .001 level.

Regarding the length of time the men had held the majority of the responsibility for childcare and household tasks, responses varied from as little as two months to as long as 22 years. Three-fourths of the men, though, had held their current nontraditional role for a year or longer.

#### Background Factors

When asked what factors in their lives led to their current lifestyles, the most frequently given answers were that their wives went to work, the economy changed, or they decided to go back to school. Regarding the familial background of these men, ten of their mothers worked when they were growing up, but in none of their families had their fathers been the primary caretaker. Eleven of the men reported that their parents' roles or attitudes influenced their present lifestyle, although three of these were in the opposite direction from the roles modeled by their parents.

#### Reactions of Others

The reactions of most, but not all wives, to the change in roles was positive. Comments ranged from her feeling somewhat guilty to liking to be able to say her husband helps at home. According to the husbands seven of the wives love their work, four do not like their jobs, with five wives having mixed feelings such as enjoying working but would rather be home herself.

Regarding male peer reactions, the most frequently given answer was that they had received no feedback. Four men reported some ribbing, four men reported a positive reaction, and one man mentioned that perhaps other males were a little bit jealous!

More positive than negative reactions from parents and in-laws were

reported. Only 2 of the 16 men reported any negative comments from the parents while 3 reported negative feedback from the inlaws.

#### Role Evaluation

When asked what things they liked best about their nontraditional role, the men most frequently mentioned being with the children and having input into the children's development. The answers most commonly given regarding effects of their roles on their children were that they were closer to their children (half mentioned this) and that their children would tend not to have preset roles.

Not surprisingly, the most frequently mentioned "worst" thing was the housework. Other hardships mentioned included boredom, worrying about not moving ahead in life, not enough time for hobbies and/or themselves, not much privacy, finding it harder to keep secrets because the family is closer, and one man reported a wife who tended to scatter things!

When asked if they would want to continue the arrangement on a relatively permanent basis, nine said they would want to continue, five said no, and two said they wanted more of a 50/50 arrangement. When asked if they would recommend their lifestyle to other couples, fifteen said yes. On a one (very unhappy) to ten (very happy) scale regarding their satisfaction with their current lifestyle, the mean was 7.96 with a range from 5 to 10.

#### Personality Characteristics

In scoring the Bem Sex Role Inventory Hyde and Phillis' (1979) medians for 21- to 40-year-old men were utilized. Men who scored above the masculinity median (4.91) and the femininity median (4.95) were considered androgynous, men who scored at or below both medians were considered undifferentiated, and men who scored above on one median and at or below the median on the other were sex-typed masculine or feminine. In the present sample, five men were androgynous, five were masculine, one was feminine, and three were undifferentiated. The mean

masculinity score of these men was 5.20, and the mean femininity score was 4.84.

In the Hyde and Phillis sample 4% of the men were categorized as androgynous compared to 36% of the present sample. <sup>Fisher's Exact Test</sup> ~~A chi-square~~ was performed to contrast these proportions. The comparison was significant at the .05 level.

Z scores were computed to compare these men to the norm sample for 18 scales of the California Psychological Inventory (Gough, 1975). These nontraditional males scored significantly higher than the male norm sample on the dominance ( $p < .01$ ), social presence ( $p < .01$ ), self-acceptance ( $p < .01$ ), and flexibility ( $p < .01$ ) scales and significantly lower on the sense of well being ( $p < .05$ ), responsibility ( $p < .01$ ), socialization ( $p < .01$ ), self-control ( $p < .01$ ), and good impression ( $p < .01$ ) scales.

#### Data Relationships

A number of significant Spearman's rho correlations emerged from the data. The age of the men was positively correlated ( $r = .47, p < .05$ ) with the importance of work for the wife outside the home. Wife's educational level was positively correlated with the number of hours worked by the man outside the home ( $r = .48, p < .05$ ), negatively correlated with the average number of masculine tasks the men performed ( $r = -.51, p < .05$ ), and positively correlated with the average number of masculine tasks the wives performed ( $r = .52, p < .05$ ).

The number of children in the family was negatively related to the percentage of total household tasks performed by the men ( $r = -.49, p < .05$ ), positively related to the length of time they had been responsible for the childcare/household responsibilities ( $r = .70, p < .001$ ), and positively related to the masculinity scale on the BSRI ( $r = .59, p < .05$ ). The socioeconomic level of the family was positively correlated to the number of hours per week the wife worked outside the home ( $r = .57, p < .01$ ) and the length of time the men had been responsible for the childcare/household responsibilities ( $r = .64, p < .01$ ).

For the ten men whose mothers worked, the men's age when their mothers started working was positively correlated ( $\underline{r} = .60, p < .05$ ) with the average proportion of masculine household tasks they performed and negatively correlated with the average proportion of masculine tasks their spouse performed ( $\underline{r} = -.56, p < .05$ ) and the masculinity scale of the BSRI ( $\underline{r} = -.84, p < .01$ ).

The number of hours the men worked outside of the home was positively correlated with the total household tasks performed by their wives ( $\underline{r} = .57, p < .05$ ) but negatively correlated with their rating of the importance of work to their wives ( $\underline{r} = -.62, p < .01$ ). Importance of work in the wives' lives was positively correlated with the percentage of total childcare tasks performed by the men ( $\underline{r} = .47, p < .05$ ).

The length of time the men had been responsible for the childcare/household tasks was positively correlated with the masculinity scale of the BSRI ( $\underline{r} = .52, p < .05$ ) and negatively correlated with the total household tasks performed by the men ( $\underline{r} = -.55, p < .05$ ). Total childcare tasks performed by the men was negatively correlated with the length of time they expected to continue their lifestyle ( $\underline{r} = -.48, p < .05$ ).

Degree of happiness with their lifestyle was negatively correlated with the proportion of total household tasks the men performed ( $\underline{r} = -.76, p .001$ ) and positively correlated with the proportion of total household tasks performed by their wives ( $\underline{r} = .66, p .01$ ). Also the average proportion of masculine tasks performed by the men was negatively correlated ( $\underline{r} = -.77, p < .001$ ) to the degree of happiness while the average number of masculine tasks performed by the wives was positively correlated ( $\underline{r} = .78, p < .001$ ).

#### Discussion

All of the men in this sample performed more of the household (mean of 59.4%) and childcare (mean of 58.9%) tasks than did their spouses. In addition,

the majority of the men (75%) had held this nontraditional role for at least a year. Factors related to their adopting this lifestyle included their wives working, the changing economy, and their going back to school as well as their childhood background. Ten of the men (62.5%) reported that their mothers worked when they were growing up. This is a somewhat higher percentage of mothers working than what Hoffman reports for 1980 (Hoffman, 1983). Also, eleven of the men said that the attitudes and roles of their parents influenced them, though three said in an opposite direction.

Some of the significant data relationships were understandable. The number of hours the men worked outside the home was positively correlated with the total household tasks performed by their wives while number of children in the family was negatively related to the percentage of household tasks performed by the men. Also, wife's educational level was positively correlated with the average number of masculine tasks the wives performed. The importance of work for the wives was positively related to the percentage of childcare tasks performed by the men. Men's happiness with their lifestyle was negatively related to the proportion of total household tasks they performed and positively related to the proportion of household tasks performed by the wives. Since for both men and women household tasks can become mundane, boring, and seemingly endless, these relationships are not surprising.

On the other hand, a number of unexpected correlations emerged in the analyses. The age of the men was positively correlated with the importance of work for the wife outside the home, possibly implying that older women were more involved in a "career" rather than a job. Wife's educational level, though, was positively correlated with the number of hours worked by the man outside the home. The length of time the men had performed major household and childcare tasks was positively related to the number of children in the family, as well as

the socioeconomic level of the family. The latter finding is especially interesting in light of the wage differential between men's and women's salaries.

The masculinity scale of the BSRI was also significantly correlated with length of time men had been responsible for the childcare/household tasks as well as to the number of children in the family but negatively related to the men's age when their mother started working.

Though most of the men in this study became househusbands due to economic reasons rather than because of a conscious role choice, all but one indicated that they would recommend their lifestyle to others, and on a ten-point (high) scale, estimated their happiness at approximately an eight. In addition, most of the men reported positive reactions from wives, parents, and in-laws.

A logical question that follows, then, is if these men are satisfied and happy with their lives and would recommend it to others, why are not more men becoming househusbands? According to Feinman (1981), males are high status actors, and high status actors in low status positions receive more disapproval than a low status actor in the same position. The housespouse role could be considered a relatively low status position. Dworkin (1981), in an attempt to categorize the housewife role according to a prestige ranking compatible with the Duncan Socioeconomic Index, found that a sample of 501 women placed housewives in the fifth decile, roughly equivalent to a sales clerk or a nurse. The implication from Feinman's hypothesis is that a man in the housespouse position would be valued lower than a female in the same position. Miller, Gonzales, and Adams (in press), in two studies with college students, found that male housespouses were evaluated lower than female housespouses on a semantic differential scale.

In other words, when a female espouses masculine values and has a career, she is becoming upwardly mobile. However, a man becoming a housespouse, becoming

like a woman, is challenging one of the basic underlying assumptions, by giving up his higher status, of our capitalistic society (Bear, Berger, and Wright, 1979).

Several additional studies provide evidence that males in nontraditional roles are devalued. When asked to rate the mental health of twelve stimulus persons, college students indicated that sex-role deviant males (males having feminine careers and interests) were less well adjusted and would be more likely to need psychiatric help than sex-role congruent males or sex-role deviant females (Tilby and Kalin, 1980). The sex-role deviant females, however, were considered as well-adjusted as the sex-role congruent females. Similarly, Shaffer and Johnson (1980) found that male stimulus persons portrayed in a feminine occupation (telephone operator) were thought to be a less attractive job candidate than a female operator or a male or female telephone installer. Also, in a national survey, Rosen, Jerdee, and Prestwich (1975) found that managers and executives were less likely to approve a month's leave to care for children when the request was made by a male rather than a female accountant.

Supportive but indirect data for this hypothesis comes from research indicating earlier and stronger socialization of the male than female gender role. For example, Blakemore, LaRue, and Olejnik (1979) found that boys, but not girls, as young as two years of age show sex-role appropriate toy preferences. In a second study (Connor and Serbin, 1978) fourth, sixth, and eighth grade boys preferred stories about males at all ages, and the preference increased with grade level. The preference by girls for stories about females was not significant at the .05 level. Best and her colleagues (Best, Williams, Cloud, Davis, Robertson, Edwards, Giles, and Fowles, 1977) found that knowledge by children of male stereotypic traits appeared earlier than knowledge about female stereotypic traits.

Other evidence is also available implying that becoming a housewife would be hard for a man. Skovholt and Morgan (1981) suggest that for men careers are closely tied to their identity, and that a man without occupational success might expect problems in the area of self-esteem. Other articles have been published discussing counseling men in the area of nontraditional sex roles (O'Neil, 1981; Tauss, 1976).

If it is hard in this society for men to assume nontraditional roles such as that of househusband, what characteristics made the men in this study different enough to assume this role and, in addition, to be willing to talk about it? Data from the Bem Sex Role Inventory and the California Psychological Inventory may provide some insight to this question. Thirty-six percent of the men were classified as androgynous this percentage was significantly higher than the 4% reported for 21- to 40-year-old men by Hyde and Phillips (1979).

According to their responses on the California Psychological Inventory, these men tend to be high in dominance, social presence, self-acceptance, and flexibility. The last three of these seem intuitively right since a man willing to hold such a nontraditional role must be flexible as well as confident of himself. The high dominance score might partly reflect this needed confidence, as the descriptors for persons scoring high on this scale include "aggressive, confident, persistent, and planful...self-reliant and independent; and as having leadership potential and initiative" (Gough, 1975, p. 10). In addition the men scored significantly lower on the sense of well being, responsibility, socialization, self-control, and good impression scales. Low scorers on the sense of well being scale tend to be seen as "unambitious, leisurely, awkward, cautious, apathetic, and conventional; as being self-defensive and apologetic; and as constricted in thought and action" (Gough, 1975, p. 10). One interpretation is that these men were a little uncomfortable with their role and

defensive towards possible negative societal sanctions. Low scores on the responsibility, socialization, and self-control scales may imply a person who takes responsibility somewhat less seriously and who is not as strongly socialized, at least in traditional ways. The score on the good impression scale may imply that these men are less concerned with how others perceive them.

Caution may be in order in the interpretation of these scores, however. Perhaps some of the significant differences may be due to changes in male cohorts since the establishment of the norms rather than the differences between these males and the 1984 "average" male.

For various reasons some men, including the men in this sample, are assuming major household/childcare responsibilities. Flexibility in the male role is important for several reasons: 1) as more males become "househusbands," the housewife role will probably be valued more and be given more prestige since Touhey (1974) reports that the prestige of an occupation goes up if more males enter the field; 2) for women to be able to choose careers and families and not have to be stressed superwomen, men who are interested in sharing housework are essential, and 3) males are given more choices regarding how to spend their adult lives. Ultimately they, as are women, would be free to choose without stigma to have careers, to combine careers and families, or to invest their energies primarily in their home and families.

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